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Four
Quarters



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Four Quarters

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Marginalia . . .

FUGUE FOR TIN EARS

"The eye reader is a barbarian," wrote Robert Frost. For a New Englander characteristically given to understatement, it is splendid hyperbole with just the right touch of anger and poet's indignation. To a poet, or to any writer who recognizes that language is sound before it is written symbol, the eye reader is indeed the barbarian at the gates, threatening the destruction of the city. The siege is already well underway.

We have become a nation of eye readers, flocking to speed reading schools where we learn to ignore the word and swallow ideas in chunks as large as an improved eye span will allow. Such a habit may be helpful if all we ever want to read is indigestible reports and jargon-filled journals; perhaps such language is better swallowed whole, like a spoonful of castor oil. But when language is used artistically, when the writer is combining the sound and the sense, the pauses and the subtle rhythmic variations and stresses, the eye reader is lost and groping, a grotesque creature I visualize as a huge eyeball, sans ears, sans nose, sans touch, sans everything.

Ironically, in an age when we are bombarded by amplified sounds, many of us have lost the ability or the desire to transform the printed word back into the living, spoken language. Worse, we have failed to see the importance of doing so and have actually encouraged both readers and writers to think in terms of lifeless ink symbols, ignoring or forgetting the oral tradition that was our glory. The consequences are everywhere to be seen.

*Writers themselves are victimized by their tin ears. Mark Twain used to read his work out loud to his beloved Livy and the children. Hawthorne read the whole of *The Scarlet Letter* aloud to Sophia, and when he came to the end his voice so shook with emotion that he could barely finish. If only every writer today would do the same! Sitting at my desk, I reach out and take down a textbook at random. (That's not entirely true; I saw a social science text on the shelf and I knew I'd find a suitable example there.) I flip a few pages and pick out a representative sample of the prose: "A major effect of this population*

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Poet's Portfolio: William Heyen

May 29, 1974

Dear Richard,

Today was the official publication date of *Noise in the Trees: Poems and a Memoir*. I spent this morning sort of throwing papers relating to that book, which took six or seven years to fill out, into boxes and folders and into the garbage or closet. I want to clear things away *physically* so that I can get on with other work.

Anyway, one of my desk's drawers was filled up with "poems" that were trying to get to be a part of the book, but didn't make it. I got interested, and thought a few other people who have read *Noise* or will read it might be interested in some of these things. It's curious to me how the crabs in "Crabbing at Seaford" got to be the crabs in "Crabbing at St. James Harbor" of *Noise*: it's interesting to me how some of the thought trying to struggle through in the stilted "The View from Polaris" got into "The Cat" and "Cat and Star" of the book. There are lots of other connectives, as you'll see.

Apologies. What happened was that I spied "The Crickets" in that stuff in that drawer and took a liking to it—it's finished, I think, and good, but got lost or abandoned or something—and thought of sending it to you for *Four Quarters*. Then I found "October," which I still like—notice how "nowhere else" means nowhere else but into simile, poetry. Then I dug a little more and found "The Ponds" and distinctly remembered that it was the first of my Long Island poems. Finally, out of the hundreds of things in the drawer, I came up with sixteen pieces and the bright idea of sending them to you. They all go back six or seven years to when I was trying to find ways to get some of the emotions I felt about my youth on Long Island into lyric poems. The poems in *Noise*, it seems to me, show different kinds of maturation. Still, I'd be pleased if these things found a little magazine that wanted them.

Very best,
Bill

Dear Bill,

We are happy to be that little magazine. "Pet's Death" found its way into *Four Quarters* several years ago, and it is good to see it again in your new book.

Noise in the Trees is one of the important collections to appear this year and our readers will delight in seeing some of the works that helped that volume take shape. "The Crickets" is hardly worth losing sight of; in fact many of these pieces bear reading again and again. Analogies between the settings, the subjects, and even some of the figures in the poems become increasingly obvious, while all sixteen poems provide a poignant introduction to the Long Island you later recreated so lovingly and so completely.

Richard

The Ponds

Where the ponds were
there are houses with deep cellars.
I walk by at night, and sometimes
the houses are afloat
on lawns of lily pads.

The captains of the arks must dream
heavy dreams,
dreams that spiral as though in the wakes
of great turtles fathoming
the still-fragrant mud.

The turtles' backs are spined.
Their eyes glint red as coals
beneath the dark cellars.
The jaws are caves. They waggle
the worms of their pink tongues.

Terlik

When Terlik, that old Pole
who punched out and polished
mother-of-pearl buttons
in a workshop behind his house
across the street from us, died,
two hearses, one filled with flowers
and one weighed down with him,
drove around his half-circle driveway.
His dog barked like crazy, and maybe
all the Sound's oysters clapped their shells.

The Birds

Ice glitters
on the branches of the oaks.
The branches
are like rods of glass.

The wind, blowing
off the Canadian glaciers
rattles branches.
At night, we hear a hailstorm.

In the morning three bone-white birds,
the skeletons of birds,
flap their ways to the tops of the oaks.
It's the end of the world.

October

The robins lost color and disappeared.
The gulls flew higher.

Geese honked in V's, long streams of starlings
glided over Nesconset.

The shadows of clouds
floated across the grass like zeppelins.

My brother's white tumblers broke
from their loft like arrows.

I had nowhere else to go
from this far north of summer.

Rods and Cones

Fast awake.

Against the lids of my closed eyes:
dragonflies over the ponds,
fireworks over the lake.

Lake Ronkonkoma

A chair sails through a window,
turns over lazily, seats
the moon, and splashes into the lake.
Like knives, slivers of glass
sift through the water.

The pavilion's bright deck
is howling. From this far
it looks like a dance. But
it is summer. The city boys
are waking up the lake again.

The View from Polaris

Soon, the light that strikes Polaris
in waves will carry Columbus' ships
to the new world. The great forest
will stretch from the Island's breast
to the Mississippi, skeins
of buff pigeons will sweep the sky,
herds of bison will gather on the plains
like dark clouds. But centuries will flood
that far star until . . .

But the mind, too, has waves, turns
against itself. Ahab tells us
to hark to the lower layers of meaning.
Where else does the white whale float,
mossbacked and broad-fluked,
where else does it billow and geyser
if not in time's wash, if not
in the rushing riptides
of the earth's light?

Wysteria

It had its roots
deep in the wild Island.

It stained
the stucco walls
of our garage
with green snakes,

and even overnight
choked its doors.

You'd wish it stayed
in the woods
with the honeysuckle,
or grew, another
species of anemone,
at the bottom of the lake.

You'd regret hacking at it
all the time.
But it was one part flower
and three parts octopus.

Crabbing at Seaford

You'd choose the fattest killies
and force them, one by one,
to eat the wire. When you'd skewered
a dozen or so you'd bend
the wire to a circle.

Your dropline quivered
when your circle of fish touched
the water's mud bottom.
You'd feel the crabs rip at your bait
and try to draw them toward your net.

The crabs wanted bottom
but wanted the killies, which first
rose into sight, just a suggestion of white
in the dark water, and then the crab or two
gripping the killies with blue-white claws.

The Bees

I tried turning a fishbowl
upside down over the yellowjackets' burrow,
and hoped it would fill up with bees,
but they stayed in their nests

underground, or had another exit.
They were the ones that got away.
They filled up our fallen apples and pears like maggots.
Only my father could rake them.

The Bees

Upside down over the yellowjackets' hole
the fishbowl filled up with bees,
a buzzing, blooming confusion,
a dangerous yellow flower

bowled over by Buster
who yelped and ran
as the yellow petals
flew at him in a furious wind and stung.

The Crickets

Either the crickets stopped,
or you fell asleep as they kept on.

But sometimes you'd count their song
all night, when you couldn't sleep,
or dreamed you couldn't sleep, or dreamed
you were under the damp grass hearing them sing.

The Mice

When we first moved to Nesconset
and saw the rabbit hutches lifted
on stilts like dark cranes,
we thought they were empty.

Under their tarpaper blisters
were the nests of mice.
We'd press down and force them
to drop into a pail, collect

maybe a dozen, and drown them all.
We used a mass grave,
buried whole families of mice there
under the clump of birches in the woods.

When Buster walked by he whined
and pawed the ground.
First leaves, then snow
covered whatever sins we committed.

The Dogwoods

Old man Budka,
who'd built our house
and lived in it before us,
had planted them.

We never trimmed the one pink
and two white dogwoods
on our front lawn.
Their lowest branches

bent to the grass.
When I forced my way in
and stood underneath
my skin was light green.

When they bloomed they held
as many bees as blossoms.
That spring we sprayed
bees fell on the grass like rain.

The Moon

He wouldn't have been out of place,
the man in the white robe
who rode a donkey
and made miracles.

Wenzel's chicken coops were lifted on stilts.
The moon turned them to grazing deer.
Even my father's woodshop became the palace
of the king of snow.

Summer Evening

The trees' shadows have touched.
Power mowers sleep in their sheds, dreaming of toads.
Crickets scrape their music.
Dogs are the roosters of evening.

Every few days someone dies.
Neighbors are closer together now.
Overnight the roads grow lanes.
Wenzel hums a psalm on his porch.

A spotlight circles the sky.
Trucks barrel the turnpikes.
We snap open cans of beer.
Moths batter the porchlight.

A breeze rustles the leaves.
Why are my poems so sad?
We go inside for sweaters
and stay to watch the news.

The Dying Fall

J. D. McCLATCHY

Thurs eve / Nov 17

On the plane this morning I read Virginia Woolf's suicide note. (In the last volume of her husband's autobiography—I recommend it to you both.) Its sad ironies are more moving than its final despair. 'I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. . . . You have given me the greatest possible happiness. . . . I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been. V.'

Leonard was doing the rhododendrons and she went out over the lawn—the sun shuddering sleep and the voices—across the water-meadows and walked into the river. The note he found that afternoon spoke of her desperate, confused haste. 'I can't fight any longer. You see I can't even write this properly. I can't read.' But on her writing block he found the drafts of this inability—several of them, each as carefully composed. In fact, she had interrupted working on them to have lunch with him. Does this lessen the horror or heighten it?

Arrived at St. Paul's about 10:30—met by a student with gentle, dim features and hair as long as fashion allows. He made suggestions and arrangements, and escorted me through a campus tour to an official coffee session. The day itself was grimly colorless, as though in sympathy with the buildings here—yet they were modest, as suitable as familiar gestures, and the students who leaned against them seemed content enough. A few even stared.

It was another of those affairs where the college trustees are trotted out to meet A Distinguished Poet, and we are supposed to impress one another no end. I was saddled with a woman about whom everything had fallen, apparently, but her income. She wore a face like a teaspoon's reflection, and assumed she

was 'artistic' because she had read Turgenev and had a brother who was homosexual. Perhaps it was only the bad coffee, but I began to play the shabby vulgarian with her, and we stood it off like a pear and a huckleberry. She rather reminded me of Caroline M., in Rome after the first war, who also thought it expected of her to be considered 'eccentric.' She would take me to concerts of experimental music (I was bored but she was paying) and sit staring at her lap, eating hard candy, until the concert was over, when she would applaud more loudly than anyone. At least my trustee offered me a *Players*, which stung sweetly—like the smell of rot in salt marshes.

A long hour later we moved on to the reading. The hall was filled (600?). The English Dept chairman—a small, nervous grackle—did the introduction, concluding (more in charity than in truth) that 'there is no serious reader of modern poetry who has not found at least one poem by Alston Banner necessary to him.' The grace of the compliment made up for its lack of any accuracy—a pleasant thought, though. But I could see this audience wanted harsh visions, needed other worlds than its own. It was going to be a difficult day.

I began with a poem by JPB and one by Hart, and tried to explain something of the bell-broken tower. Then my own; some lighter pieces—*Habit Forming*, *Janiculum*, *Time of Her Life*, the Sicilian lyrics. Then: *A Dark Lady* (applause), *Conscience*, *Five Fables*. And since I have to do it in NY next week, I thought I would try out *The Poem*. It had been two years since I had read it last—and almost thirty since it had made my name. Once again Capt Henry Lord Page King brightens, again the charge up Mary's Hill at Fredericksburg, the same six bullets, the last dull slug slamming behind his stare, his mouth opening in command and filling with blood, again his body strapped to his slave's horse and walked back through a shattered, fulfilled history, back to Georgia.

They were polite, but would obviously have preferred someone with a beard and a bag of tricks. Perhaps they were right. I read the elegy as though it had been written by someone else, and it must have seemed to them like watching newly blinded eyes wandering without focus, still looking for light—habit trying to create need. That time of year thou mayst in me behold. Before we left I parried the usual Penetrating Questions with a generalization or a joke—whichever was least appropriate—posed for pictures, signed a release and a few books, and fled.

But not far. The college president (Beck or Burke; I forgot the name) led us on to a luncheon, at which I knew I would be

expected to entertain with anecdotes about Tom Eliot and Bill Faulkner—the familiarities would be worth the stories. Before lunch, though, the president—an abstracted gray eminence of a priest—paused for a sudden, accustomed grace which surprised me into blessing myself—a hesitant hand tracing a clumsy burden of guilt. But all of our guilts, I suppose, are just old beliefs, and perhaps we only believe in what we have survived. Forgive us, this day, our daily bread.

I was tired, nerves jerking, stomach tossing. And I sat down to a plate that made me afraid. It was only a salad of crushed meat—I didn't eat it—but a pineapple ring squatted on top like death's eye. How many more of these do I sit through like final judgments? With a career already folded into footnotes and summarizing paragraphs, under photographs that have caught me in the distortion of awkward moments, there is something almost disgusting in exposing it all. But the reason came soon enough—and from my trustee. Mr. Banner, will you raise your children any differently than you would have if they had been born, say, forty years ago?

I won't live long enough to raise them at all, I answered—which stopped both of us. Behind her question may have sulked a vague resentment that a man of 73 should have two-year-old twin sons. But what could I tell her—and suddenly I wanted to terribly—of a marriage that had produced images instead of heirs? Not that I have anything to leave you—your only inheritance will be my reputation which, if it survives long enough for you to be aware of it, will probably only make you uncomfortable. But someday you may realize how selfish I was—that obsessive need to make something more of myself. Ben Jonson his best piece of poetrue. And when Isabel had passed her time, I couldn't live with her any longer. There was a frightening emptiness then that scared us into reminiscences which we served each other like stale slices of toast. Whether the past finally cleared or merely changed, the effect was the same, and things as simple as our old passion for Backhaus we understood when we remembered now what we had heard. Night after night Isabel and I would go to his concerts in Dresden, in another time, and listen to him ignore the notes and ride the phrase recklessly towards silence. Like guttering lights at an altar, the crowds around us pleaded, with flowers and anxious tears, to be silenced again, and that stiff, bulky man would find out the death in their hearts and his fingers went for what they did not realize. It had taken almost forty years for us to sense he was playing from his own isolation, and from ours.

Within three months, my regrets—did it only seem bitter-

ness to Isabel?—left me feeling I could only be just to her, and the only true justice, finally, is indifference.

Of course I couldn't live alone either—so I rescued myself into an illness, a year of 'nervous exhaustion' with a niece. She had her father's droop and whine, but she was patient and hired the nurse whom I married. Did you know that your mother wanted first to be a nun? Has she told you that yet? (She would have made a dreadful nun!) Her hair was cut as short and straight as a veil, her eyes looked brightly beyond one. But she understood precisely and redeemed my last small strengths into you two—twin images of a hope delayed past despair. Keats and Eliot, my only heroic couplet—mock-heroic, I suppose, since born to ages' sad parody of its poet; no teeth, no hair, and weak, wet eyes. And you have grown too slowly, and the balance you keep for me death will upset soon and carefully. I can only provide, provide. \$800 today—half already lost to expenses and taxes, the rest to unknown or forgotten accounts, so keep going, old man. Give them more than a young mother and a journal, scratched in haste, in love. Are memories, advice and complaints enough, boys? How old are you now—twenty, thirty? Old enough to have felt I betrayed you and ridiculed myself? Read this again in ten years and it will seem better, less fatuous—more than the only thing we have between us. Do you have a sense of *me*?? A sense of the oldest part of yourselves—a center sucking you slowly towards grass banks and burnt pines and scarred, slate-blue heron waiting for slugs and sand-crabs to crawl into its sudden, sharp rush, its quiet kill. Maybe tomorrow.

Come one, Banner, you're muddling—seize the day. After lunch I was taken to a student seminar. Some were timid, some bored, some assured and annoying. I think Wordsworth speaks of a peace so perfect that the young behold with envy what the old man hardly feels. Yes. They started by asking questions on topics they hoped I had written on, or imagined I should have. Obviously no one had read my essays, or enjoyed my poems. Their questions were so vague I couldn't understand them, or so specific I knew too well. One kid asked about old poems as though he were turning over heavy stones for skinks. Another tried with petulant subtlety to carp about my 'restricting regionalism,' until I said I'd believe he knew what he was talking about if he could tell me what a mule was. He shut up.

By five I'd managed the thin white envelope, profuse farewells, and a taxi to this airport motel, from which my view is of Mother Madonna's parlor of advice and the funeral home of Fortune F. Harris. Which houses more uncertainty? I was so tired, I sat dumbly paging through *Life's* burning babies and

beauty queens, staring through the chambers of a heart, and sent down for a couple of drinks and some soup which seem to have settled me. Worked for a while on my notebook, the blackened pages accumulated like a storm that passes to break fitfully over the sea—worth saving: City sirens lace the swollen Kyrie,/but the chant lifts our dead beyond their losses . . .

I feel like a failed suicide fingering his scars. Or better, like Lazarus, between two deaths and accustomed to dying. What did *he* tell them of his black days? No doubt he kept silent until his next end; certainly he couldn't have thanked the quiet man who had called him from the tomb. Did they ask him for statements on Vietnam or accuse him of refusing to speak on the cruelty around them? Didn't they realize the only cruelty was in forcing him back?

Why all this self-indulgence? I could have hoarded up some dignity and retired. I could have taken pictures of family headstones in Georgia and framed them on my walls, surrounded my bed with them like candles. Why then the pride, the panic, in making sons—not one, but two—only to abandon them as easily as poems? Was it some sort of grotesque reassurance? A pitiable defiance? What drives a man to stalk his best work until it can't be said?

You can feel sorry for me, can't you both?

Later

No, not self-indulgence, just plain self-pity. We are all penny prophets predicting what has already turned out against us. We long for respect and settle for fame—and live on air in the branches of rotting oaks. The stars still move to our silence, and the bears dance only if we feed them.

So here I am, shuffling between motels, lugging around my career like a hacked limb—pantomiming, for these new students of it, the mocking fate of the American poet—the unwilling survivor of his own last vision. Think of that chilly, cultivated cubist Wallace Stevens, afraid to open his door on flames, haunting the expectation of hanging in the trees next spring. Or old Whitman lying crippled in Camden, a sad, stringy beard stuck to withered cheeks—no longer is he rocking chants, he has forgotten he had sung, had stroked the wounds of soldiers, had walked into the sea and embraced the shore's terror. He asks now only to be carried in a blanket to his chair where again today—for the last time?—he will be querulously transposing punctuation, the final epic of question marks and commas. It is

not what to say or how to stir, but when to pause and where to stop. We end by second-guessing half-forgotten intuitions.

We live in a world so stupidly generous that it awards failure for not having succeeded, as easily as it does success for not having failed. It has no desires, and so no expectations. It is satisfied with what it has imagined for us. And we submit until we are satisfied too. It is always too late to change even what has not happened.

Much Later

Can't sleep. Hacking, headache, Run out of cigarettes and energy to get more. Tarred, tired lungs choking on air now, inflating towards my heart, cramped with death. Headache. If I can leave this room, if I can put down this pen, get out of bed and stumble into the lobby, right now, it would_____ If you stopped reading this _____ stop, right now, my sons.

No, see, you haven't. You can but you don't. Why? Are you as selfish as I have been? The same pride and panic? You are reading this for the same reason I am writing it, but you are searching not for what is hidden but for what is *lost*. No matter when or how or even why. I cannot recover it and often doubt if I would want to. In that we are the same. Indifference, I tell you, is the only genuine compassion left us. STOP READING THIS. Must I stop before you will? I *have*, can't you see. Empty as a bloodless womb. I am only calling you out of your tombs. You are only listening to V.'s voices and can't concentrate. Walk into rivers, sons, let out your last breaths like prayers, wait to watch them break into air, and then rest downwards and clutch the dead. Here, here is what is important for you:

Now what have you learned? More than I have ever said, more than I will ever write in these copybooks. I am tired of you all. Maybe tomorrow.

Reverie and Departure

CLAUDE KOCH

THINGS are doors and open inward. Once when Gordie was seven and I was six, Dad took us to Brigantine in December on his birthday, across the spindly causeway and the drawbridge to the stucco lighthouse, by the long sandy acres with the streets laid out, but no houses and no paving, only the yellow inland sand and the round stones shaping up to the weather. I thought it was a funnel to the sky. Gordie didn't talk much. He said "Yoh" a lot. We thought he had a speech defect. It was dark in the lighthouse, and Dad held my hand. Gordie ran ahead. I could hear the steps pulling away and making a hollow bin of the dark that filled with the sound of my heart. Then there was cold light up ahead and Gordie's shadow filled it and diminished, and Dad's long shape took his place. Gordie always drew my heart after him, but then I didn't realize. Dad held me, out on the catwalk of the lighthouse; I was dizzy and began to cry.

"Lolly," he said, "don't look down. Look at how far away the clouds are." I looked up and fell into the sky.

"Catch me! Hold me . . . !" His big hands over my shoulder and at the back of my head are there now. Would I still be tumbling among the gulls and the wintry terns if he hadn't caught me? Gordie was leaning with his back to the railing, his eyes slanted like a chinaman's as they always did when he was scared by a thought. "She's crazy," he said. And he climbed over the railing and dangled himself. The wind hauled his scarf away like a pennant.

"Enough," Dad said. "No acrobatics." Gordie climbed back. "We'd better go down." On the way down I heard the swishing sound, and crunching.

"What's that? What's that?"

Dad hoisted me up on his shoulder, but he wouldn't say.

"Beetles," Gordon said. "You're squashing beetles." He knew it'd turn me green. It was so long ago.

Outside, the coarse grass like seaweed jutted through the pavement cracks. "That's hair," Gordie said. "Who's under there?" I hopped them across the slabs of concrete set like a rough sea cemented over. Where were we going? A great old hotel of shingle and yellow plaster appeared and disappeared over the dunes. Only Dad could see it whole. Gordie shied stones at the telegraph poles. They lifted sagging wires, singing over wastes of sand toward nothing at all. "Where are we going, Dad? Where are we going?"

"A mystery," he said, and smiled above us. A blast of wind raised a whirligig of sand and we buried our faces in his back, and stumbled over his heels. "Belay that, you'll scuttle me," he said. We talked like sailors. We leaned across a deck into the ramping waves.

"Orphans of the storm," he said, when a great blast pushed us back, laughing and laughing.

Then I heard the roar, all at once when the wind went away. I knew that Voice. It was under the horizon and it traveled on the waves. "Lift me up, Dad. I want to see!" Gordie ran ahead. From the top of the dunes he waved to us, and pointed and grinned his silly grin.

"Stout Cortez," Dad said. He set me on his shoulders and I was taller than Gordie. I held Dad's head and knocked off his hat. Then I held his hair and buried my nose in it. It smelled of salt and December.

Gordie leaned into the wind like a stick. Between us and the beach the long road stretched up and down the shore, more lonely because it was paved and there was nothing to move on it, to or from the old hotel.

"Where's everybody?"

"The depression did that," Dad said. "Once people had great hopes here." He lowered me to his side and pressed my shoulder. "Someday people will try again."

I held his leg and listened to the Voice.. I heard it sometimes at night when it said: "I . . . e . . . e . . . crus . . . s . . . s . . . h . . . h . . . I crush . . ."—not loud, but drawn and sibilant. Gordie lifted his hands in an imaginary spyglass.

"What do you see, son?" Waves broke over the bulkhead and the asphalt darkened with spray.

"A bucket of blood," Gordie said. He limped down the dune; he was Long John Silver. "Lay aboard . . .!" He raised his sword and charged the seawall.

Then the planes flew over. There were three of them and they came low over the island behind us. They were blue with stars on their wings, and Gordie and I jumped up and down and waved to them. Then Gordie was a plane; he spread his arms and roared and fluttered his tongue. Dad had his hand to his eyes to keep out the winter glare from the sea.

"That's odd," he said. "There's no naval air station back there."

"I'm going to be a pilot," Gordie said.

"And me! Me too!"

"She's crazy."

"I can if you can."

"You'll both be pilots," Dad said. "There's room for all sorts of odd things up there."

"She was scared at the lighthouse."

"Lolly is just curious," Dad said.

"Where are we going, Dad?"

"I want to show you the wreck."

That was the first we heard of it; it was Gordie's surprise.

"Down the beach, beyond the hotel." But we couldn't get on the beach. It was high tide. We walked by the retaining wall while Dad tramped down the middle of the road. Where the beach was eroded away and the waves pitched spray over the wall, we ran back and hid behind his legs. There was a sand bar that the waves talked to; I could almost make out what they said. It was long to the hotel. The spray dazzled, but we weren't cold. Once, when the wind shifted, we heard a long horn from over the island toward the inland waterway; and once it died; and a bell counted seven far out beyond the bar. The light went silver from a cloud, and a great shadow stretched across us out to the open sea. I thought it was Dad's hand.

He pointed ahead and over the wall:

"There it is. See the mast?" The hotel was a block away; I could see the windows boarded up, five stories of them. A pier leaned out and into the water. Over the end where the waves lashed up and swamped a tilting shack, I numbered the canted stacks. "Wow. . . ." Gordie took off, and I scuttled after him.

"Hold it," Dad called, but it wasn't a command and we raced on.

"My ship!" Gordie was shouting.

"No, mine . . . mine. . . ." He beat me to the hotel and sat on the cement steps, not to wait for me but for his breath. There was grass there too; the cement was cracked open. We puffed and waited for our breath, and saw the ship. It was bigger than

anything I'd ever seen, fire-blackened and torn open and thrust up on the sand bar. Where it wasn't black it was painted crazy stripes of gray and brown and greenish-blue. It cried and I heard it cry when the waves pulled back. Gordie sucked in his breath and I felt his fingers on mine. We held tight and walked slowly toward the wall, though I didn't want to go.

I looked back. Dad wasn't there. A dark shape drifted in the corner of my eye from up on the hotel, and swooped, and went away. It leaned over us—the hotel, dirty and yellow and stucco, and heavy with silence. "Where's Dad, Gordie?" But he pulled me on, and we climbed up the rocks to the wall. The ship wasn't moving, though it seemed to. The gulls wept over it. I had to admit it: "I'm scared, Gordie." He didn't move. His fingers were tight and tighter so that I cried.

"What's in there? What's it like in that hole?" He held his hands up like a spyglass again: "I'm going down to that someday," he said.

What kind of great fish was there, in all the cabins among all the dead? "Who did it, Gordie? Whoever did it?"

"The Nazis," Gordie said. "The Nazis did it. That's who."

"Yes," I heard Dad's voice over us. "A submarine put that hole in her. Just off there. It's a Britisher."

"Will the war be on when I'm old enough? Johnny's going to Canada to enlist."

"Is he, indeed?" Dad stopped and pulled us against his chest. "It was a beautiful ship. I shouldn't have brought you. I didn't think."

"Wait'll I tell the guys. . . ."

"Come on," Dad said. "Mom and your brothers will be wondering what happened to us. Let me hike you on my shoulder, Lolly."

He did. I was glad to look away. We started back. I could see the tip of the lighthouse. It was so far away I knew we'd never make it. Dad shifted me to his other shoulder and took Gordie's hand. I looked at the low horizon and shivered and fell asleep.

"Yoh!" Gordie screamed in my ear and Dad's felt hat poked me in the eye. We were all alone in the bus at the drawbridge where the flags processed, ensigns and streamers, straining from the masts through the inland waterway.

"Can we get out?" Dad asked the driver.

"They're at least six of them," he said. "Go ahead. But you'd better get back in before the last one's through. I'm late."

How could he be late when there wasn't anyone to go any-

where but us?

"Ships," Gordie said. "A mob of ships!"

They were Coast Guard Cutters, grey with huge threatening numbers on the sides. *C. G. 67*, the third one said.

"That's our birthday, Gordie! Look! Look! Me six and you seven!"

We sat on the thick pilings along the bulkhead and smelled the creosote and the bay, while the gulls cried and drifted toward the inlet and the grey boats puttered along. I got a splinter in my thumb and Gordie caught his pants on a nail. I could taste the salt on my lips, and the wind chapped it there.

"In the old days, they'd be after rum runners," Dad said. "Your mother and I used to watch them go out from over there when we were children." He pointed his long finger far away toward the inlet bulkhead across the channel and the marsh. The towers of Atlantic City were too clear for life.

"Did you always know Mom? Was it cold then?"

Dad shook his head. He pulled us both against his lumber jacket: "She'll be waiting with cocoa on the Boards when we get back."

Home was Philadelphia, but Atlantic City was a second home. Often in winters on a Sunday, and especially on a birthday, Dad would pack Mom and Johnny and Paul and Phil and Gordie and me on the Reading excursion from Camden, and we'd make a day of it at the shore. Dad said it was the sirens called us there. Today, Mom and my three older brothers were walking the Boards; maybe it was finances this time, because we drew lots to see who would go to Brigantine with Dad and Gordie.

"Look," said Gordie, "Guns!"

Dad stood up. He was awful tall in those days. "Yes," he said. "Something's odd. They never have the guns uncovered anymore. . . ."

"Let me see, Dad. Lift me up." He hoisted me again, and one of the sailors beside the gun on *C. G. 67* waved. There were big cans on a sling on the fantail, though I didn't know what to call it then. "What . . . ?"

"Depth charges," Dad said. "It must be a celebration of some kind. . . ."

"All aboard, you folks," the bus driver stuck his head out the window. "Looks like Navy Day." He had a lonely job, ferrying mostly air from Atlantic City to Brigantine in the winter time. I guess he needed us.

We crossed the bridge, and a red-faced little man ran out of the bridge house and flagged us down. "By God, what *They*

did. . . .” he sputtered, “what *They* did, you won’t believe. . . .”

That was how we heard about The War. The indignant little man was offended on the winter bridge of Brigantine: “. . . the Fleet!”

AND GORDIE wakes me, standing over me in his sailor’s uniform like Johnny of two years ago: “. . . the fleet,” I hear him say, “You’ll scuttle the fleet! I’m starved. . . .”

I learned from Mom that sleep is the one way out when things become unmanageable. She slept a lot after Dad went overseas. . . .

“So soon, Gordie?” I wonder how I must get used to thinking of him now. I try it on my tongue: Gordie *was* . . . Gordie was . . . When Gordie was home. . . .

He stood over me in the Philadelphia house, the last of my brothers to go away, in the second back room that had been Mom and Dad’s and was mine now — had been mine for eight years, since my fourteenth birthday when Dad wandered away for the last time. Spring winked through the cracks in the shutters; as long as I kept them closed, Gordie would stay in the shadows, taller than the finials of the bed, a friendly giant in the darkness. A lattice of light, insisting on the morning. Up to his neck it striped him as if he were submerged, deep in a cavern under the sea that the light reached to reluctantly. I felt the chill of deep water then. I couldn’t breathe, remembering Johnny as I dreamed of him now—water closing over his head off Inchon a year ago while the whole neighborhood about us slept and the late summer hung in the air like the pears in the garden, heavy and soft and waiting to be taken. Johnny was taken, in the smothering water and the smothering summer. And I slept through it all and didn’t know for weeks.

He moved, and the bands of light wavered and bent—tiger stripes of light on Gordie and across the counterpane. I heard the slats of the interior shutters click. Gordie said:

“I know you need your beauty sleep, sis. . . .”

“Oh, dear, I wanted to have your breakfast ready. How much time do we have?”

“The Navy moves on its stomach or not at all.” Standing between the bed and the window, with his forefinger to his temple and a clown’s concentration on his face, he took up—every-which-way—more room than there was. “What’s it today? Sinkers?”

"Idiot. Get out and let me dress."

"Right. Breakfast in this house fits a man for the Silent Service." He always had a clown's grin, a mouth bigger than a mouth should be, a head bigger than a head should be—a sure disability, I'd told him, a month ago when I realized what he'd done and why. "You'll get your head stuck in a porthole." We joked, but we did not talk of Johnny.

"I'll be waiting below," he said, and the door closed on him. Gordie was a spirit, like Percy as Falstaff saw him, a young god and a child, a hero and a clown—and I wondered how I could hold the house without him. No, I said into the mirror as I got out of bed, *I'll be waiting*. . . .

And soon there would be another summer. It was winter when Dad went away; we waited for the mailman in the snow, Mom and Phil and Johnny and Paul and Gordie and me. And Gordie and me waited for Johnny in the summer. Here it was spring. There are wars to go to all the year round. That winter's day, back over the causeway in the bus, the driver said: "I can't believe it . . . I can't believe it," over and over, and "By God, I'm through with this job. They'll be in 'Frisco next. . . ." Dad was quiet, except after Gordie climbed all over me and him: "What is it, Dad? What is it? Tell me, will'ya. . . ." He put his hand under Gordie's chin and tilted it up with his thumb and forefinger so that it was on a level with his own. He always spoke quietly:

"The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor." Most people remember President Roosevelt's announcement. I remember my father's voice on the bus from Brigantine.

"Who's gonna fight, Dad? Are you?"

Dad ran his hand back and forth through Gordie's hair, and looked out the window and smiled a little. Gordie jumped down and ran back to the rear of the bus to watch the Coast Guard cutters far away. Dad seemed far away. Then it was lonely on the bus, and I pressed up against him, and pushed both my hands into his palm open on his knee.

"It's all right, Lolly," he said. "There's nothing to worry about." The sun gave back his face in the wintry window, like a memory slipping from an old mirror losing its glaze, like a revenant. . . .

How many years have I looked into my mother's mirror as I did the morning Gordie went away. This morning. When I was a child I wept because she was gone and I could never be like her — there was no one to show me how. Now I see how

I'm like her. When I was little I thought she was beautiful; I think now of what she lost.

The bus pulled up at the boardwalk depot, beside where the Ocean City trolleys ran. We got off and Gordie ran ahead up the ramp: "Did you hear, Mom? Did you hear?" She was standing by the railing with her back to the sea, looking down at us. Dad stopped at the bottom of the ramp. I pulled his hand; he was seeing Mom. I knew him best through the years after the war when he could make no decisions at all; then, he had made a decision, in the half hour on the bus. Johnny and Gordie would make one as quietly. I see her now as he saw her then, and the distance between them. She was a presence at the height of the ramp toward which he reached, the end of all his thought: to keep her safe there he would lose her.

I put my hair up in a bun before the mirror as she wore hers then. The walk was empty behind her. The boys had gone off together. Light was silvery-cold. I reached over to the shutters and swung them inward; and though the room behind me streamed with spring, I felt the long-sleeping cold and pulled my shoulders in with it. She had borne five children and I had none, but she looked back at me from the mirror now.

Gordie was pointing out over the beach and north toward Brigantine: "It's on the sand bar, Mom. You should see it! A hole as big. . . ." He spread his arms. She didn't touch him.

His voice came from the kitchen. I could smell the bacon. "I'm starved. I've got an endless, bottomless pit to fill. Get a move on, sis."

I looked at her in the mirror. "Is this what it was like?" Dad came up the ramp. It was long. Sometimes I still fear he climbs the ramp and never reaches her, and I tag along behind, short of legs, shorter of breath, seeing her between heartbeats while his arm swings like a pendulum. He grows thinner, seen so, while she recedes. I weep for them both, for their anxieties and concerns like night moths in a great place, for their loves for each other and for us, sometimes when I wake to the slightest of the airs of spring fluttering my curtains in their room.

"You heard?" I came up under his arm as their hands touched.

"We knew it would come," Mom said. "We'll have to make provision." Of course they knew. They talked above my head while I watched for the boys down the Boards. An old man passed, limping against the wind with a frowsed head, his body canted and wide — sixteen years have fixed him in my mind

like a figure from a Japanese print. I leaned my chin on their clasped hands, and the near-empty boardwalk and the empty sea could not touch me with their vacant distances. Gordie popped up from a ramp two blocks away; and then came the others: Phil, the tallest one, and Johnny, and Paul, who carried a flag. They marched up in single file, except for Gordie who ran ahead. Phil gave the orders, as he always did — until he got his, and married a witch and put a continent between us.

“Where did you get that flag, son?” Dad stretched his hand out to Paul.

“He swiped it,” Johnny said. “We all swiped it.”

“He means borrowed.” Paul would take his precision into the Jesuits and the Philippines with him. “I’m gonna return it after the war.”

“A Chinese laundry. Outside, down there,” Gordie waved at the ramp.

“You’re going to return it now,” Mom said.

But they’re still there, gathered there: Paul clutching the flag and pointing, and Johnny contrite and Phil with his injured pride. I rest my chin on the joined hands, between the gulls’ cries and the waves suspended never to break, and the frozen wintry flourish of the old man’s cane. We are together.

“For God’s sake,” Gordie cries, “I can’t live on food for thought.”

I hear again, lives away, the interrupted Voice of the waves of the sea.

I crush, it says. . . .

Clayborn Possibilities

(for Flannery O'Connor, on the 10th anniversary of her death)

JAMES C. McCULLAGH

Peachickens hatched
in thick Georgia mud
make national copy;
we have long hungered for
clayborn possibilities
and will excuse your scarlet face
those Jezebel lines
born in the shadow of bone-death
because you died
without piping sawdust sounds
and refused to genuflect
before the world.

You must have felt punishment
as raw water wounds
its inward salt
and sheds blood
over devilish hell-sent thoughts
as waves climb after God
in a desperate hilltop whisper.
Now forests burn your finger line:
Tarwater
who is carefully coiled under God
and sleepily robbed of his sex
has enough fire in his loins
to cover leper spots
in a soft curtained world
where atmospheres converge
in Chardin's delicate soil.
You who have burnt weeds back to teeth
knew the danger of foliage
overrating the soul
until black timber
signifies mischief
and not the wrath of God.

On Gobbler's Knob

ANNABEL THOMAS

UP ON TOP of the world I saw Boann on her wedding day. She was drunk on blackberry wine lying flat on the warm ground with the morning mist rising from her shoulders.

She grew up out of the tangled vines like the beginning of all things. Her mouth was wide and smiling and stained purple. She was a big tow-headed girl and soft white hairs grew down the back of her neck and on her arms. She threw back her head and laughed up from deep inside her body until the wet soil shook. She bowed her head and pressed her mouth against the earth as if she were telling it secrets about the day it was going to die.

The dummy led us to her. Roy, that came to Kimball County with the revivalist and passed the plate for him in his tent. Roy knew where she was and for a nickel and two dimes he showed us.

He was first on top and his old yellow hound dog was second. Roy stood on the knob slobbering and grinning the way he always did, making sounds that were giggles instead of words and watching the men tramp up to where she was lying.

They were dressed in black as if they had come to hang her. They were fighting mad. I was with them, not mad but hopeful.

When the men were all on top of the knob, they stood sweating in the deep July morning and staring at Boann because they'd never seen anything like her. I stood where I could see her face when they told her.

E. M. Tussey, a barber from Powdertown, set his feet wide and hacked in his throat.

"You there," he said.

She raised her head and looked at him and through him off among the floating black mountain tops.

"She's stupid drunk," said a storekeeper from Kinny Ridge and spat among the sassafras.

"We want to know where's Georgie?" said Tussey heavily.

"Georgie," she said and it wasn't a name or a question but more a hymn like "Rock of Ages" or "Lead Kindly Light."

"She's drunk," someone said again.

Boann sat up. Her dress was dew-streaked and her shoes were gone. Still she looked like King Solomon's Queen.

"I don't know where Georgie is," she said. She started to twist up her hair and clear drops of water squeezed out of it and ran over her cheek.

"God, girl, you married him this morning, didn't you?" Tussey bawled. "You must know."

She nodded.

"I married him on this spot when the new moon set in the dark this morning. He's still here. All you got to do is look for him. Georgie's rolled up in the sun. He's jumping over the rocks in the waterfall where we swum in the dark. He's tangled in my hair."

"My God Almighty, she's soused to the eyebrows."

"These hill people is lunatic anyway."

Boann stood up. She was half a head taller than any man of us.

"The part of Georgie you're looking for is gone off somewhere," she said agreeably and started to walk away.

It hurt me to look at her. She was the Song of Songs. She was a sweet savour, a garden, a honeycomb, a roe. But she turned me into stone. It had been like that since we were children. I couldn't talk to her. I could talk to anybody but not to her. I loved her and I couldn't tell her. When she looked at me my tongue withered and slid down my throat.

But I kept coming back every summer. Even after my parents divorced and the summer place was sold I came back. This year I came too late. Boann was in love with a revivalist. Still, I had one last hope.

"Tell her," I said, "about Georgie."

Tussey coughed somewhat to loosen his throat. "Boann—"

She stopped.

"Us men is from all around the country where Georgie's been preaching. And we—"

She stood with one finger in the neck of the wine bottle, waiting.

"This Georgie of yours is a—" Tussey blurted and stopped. The tone of his voice was not pleasant. Boann didn't move but she wasn't drunk any more.

"He's God's man."

"He ain't. He —" the storekeeper from Kinny Ridge started to say but Tussey cut in, putting it off.

"How long you knowed him, girl?"

She smiled with her mouth open. "I've knowed Georgie since the hills was hot as fire and the world steaming in the sky. I've knowed Georgie since the big ferns grew here and things muttered in the mud. And before that."

"People say she went to the revival meeting for the first time last week," I said.

"Who looks after her? She ain't twenty yet, I'll be bound," Tussey said to me. "She don't know about Georgie. That's plain."

Boann sat down cross-legged on the ground with her chin in her palm. "I seen Georgie first up there at the preaching. He was saying "Sweet Jesus" and the glory was on him. His sweat was dark like blood.

"The people was talking and drowsing and they hadn't caught hold but I seen it. I stood up and I walked down the dirt path inside the tent. In there was scalding hot and the lamps beating and I stood alone up from the people and I felt Hallelujah and I felt Amen. It didn't come to me shouting but quiet and calm and that was the second time."

"She's lunatic religious."

"She don't see what you mean, Tussey."

But I felt down-hearted because I knew now Georgie was mixed up with the religiousness that was so strong in her.

"Did you ask the dummy here, Georgie's pal, where Georgie is at?" the storekeeper said to Tussey.

"He just shakes his head," Tussey answered shortly.

"What's that Roy doing outside a institution is what I want to know," a banker from Cephas whispered to me. "There is a real lunatic. He's certainly a escaped booby. He ain't got no sense at all, near as a body can tell."

I looked over at Roy. He was petting his hound like he'd lost interest in Tussey and the rest.

Boann's face was stiff. She didn't move. She was beginning to distrust us.

"For Chissake tell her," I said. I wanted to see it.

"Where's your kin, girl?" said Tussey, hedging.

Boann stood up. "What about Georgie? What do you want him for?"

She stared at me. She was turning hostile. But I wanted them to tell her, not me.

"Her grandpap raised her. He died last spring," I answered Tussey. "That hill giant with the long white hair and back

straight as a boy at eighty. Seven feet tall wasn't he, Boann?"
"And two inches more. A better man than you, Billy Watt."

She was absolutely angry now.

"He was a fine old giant," I told Tussey. "His talk was worth something to hear. He taught Boann more than I learned in college: ballads and tales and the Bible. He taught her to hunt nights. He brought her up in the fear of God and honest as a saint. That's why she'll hand you Georgie once she knows the truth about him."

I thought about the old man. Our vacation cabin was next to his farm. I used to help that giant clear off his fields and heap the brush in the front yard where he burnt it. He was a man safe and sure of himself. He farmed in the old way. His land was what he cared for. And Boann. "You look after her, Billy Watt," he said.

I could see him. And I wanted more than life to keep talking until I understood certain things about him. But the men grew impatient.

"All this ain't getting us nowhere," said the storekeeper from Kinny Ridge. "We got to find this Georgie and fast before he—"

"What I was driving at," said Tussey, "is ain't she got no house where she lives in?"

"Grandpap's farmhouse, but she doesn't live in it much."

"What I'm driving at," said Tussey, "is maybe Georgie is at her place."

"At that he might be," agreed the storekeeper. "Might be he—"

"He's already skipped out with our money if you want my opinion," offered the banker from Cephas.

They were getting closer and closer to saying it.

"Did you ever see Georgie have much money on him?" the banker asked Boann.

"Who wants to know?"

I knew her. She was deciding to throw us all down off of Gobbler's Knob.

"Better tell her," I said.

The men looked sidelong at one another. Boann walked in among us and stood above us. Her face was black.

"You," she said and took hold of Tussey's coat. "You say it."

Tussey tried to back off but she held him fast. He didn't say anything for quite a while. Then he told her.

"Georgie is a crook," he said.

"Who says that?"

"We all do," said two of the other men together, angry now and determined.

"He's talked you blind, girl, like he done us, is all," said the banker and he was bitter. "He come into our towns preaching the glory road and stole us poor."

Still she wouldn't understand.

"He spoke on the Barranquilla missionaries," Tussey told her. I saw she remembered that. "He took up collection for them every preaching. He got private donations besides. We found out there ain't no Barranquilla Missionaries. All that coin goes into Georgie's pockets and the dummy's."

Boann dropped the wine bottle. After a minute she said, "If it's money you want, I got money. Grandpap left me money in the bank. I'll get it out and I'll put it in the desk drawer in the parlour. It'll be there at sundown. You can help yourselves. You can take all you want and leave Georgie be."

"It ain't so much the money," said one man very gently. He had not spoken before. "We don't like to be fooled is the very main consideration."

"We're going to find Georgie and take back any of our money he's got left," explained Tussey flatly. "Then we're going to tar and feather that revivalist and ride him out on a rail."

Two of the younger men took off their hats, slapped their legs with them and called out "amen." It was supposed to be a mimic of the way Georgie did it. It was a mistake. Boann picked up the wine bottle and hit one of them over the head with it. He set off down Gobbler's Knob and the rest of us broke and ran too.

Boann didn't follow us. I was so disappointed I ached. I dropped behind the men trotting down the knob. When they were out of sight among the trees, I sat down to wait for Boann. I had things to say to her when she was calmer. When she figured out for herself that it was true about Georgie, she'd come down and help run him out of the country. If that happened: if, please God, that only happened, then I'd talk to her. Somehow, for the first time I'd talk to her and tell her how I felt.

I sat low and hidden away in a clump of sassafras seedlings and chewed on the slippery leaves. From that spot on the side of the knob, I could see most of Grandpap's farm.

How it would have hurt him to find those briars and burdocks in his cornfields. And the barn, door sagging open, empty of cows. And the brush heap mouldy and low and gone unkindled for years. The house itself had a dead look of blank

windowpanes and loose shingles.

It was curious how my hands itched to hoe those fields, not so much to redeem the wasted land as to follow some idea blown out of the old man's living brain that still hung like the mist over the hill fields in the year after his death.

Not for the first time I thought of staying on the farm. If only Boann and I could have lived there together. If only I could have described my soul to her one of those summer nights we hunted over the fields, it might have been me instead of Georgie. God knows one night she showed me her soul.

It was a night we had the dogs with us. Their eyes shone like quick-silvered quarters in the lantern light. That night was drunk, rocking around us warm as a hug. The black was shot with moonlight like steel in the ocean, heavy and reluctant, drifting down and down to coat the ground.

Boann was excited. She was always listening. I could see the strong silvered muscles in her neck as she leaned forward. But she wasn't listening to the dogs or the tree frogs but to something else around her and inside her. We both listened.

The farther we went the more excited she became. I could hear her quick light breathing. The night picked Boann up in its fingers and stroked her and she listened to it talk.

We had been walking along the top of a hill with the dogs not hunting much but sticking tight to us wondering together about the dark. Then I fell and broke the lantern. We were following a cow path into woods so dense we couldn't see a foot before us.

Boann went on ahead. But soon she stopped and spread her hands back to stop me and the dogs. When I came up to her I saw that she was trembling and I looked over her shoulder. The ground dropped away sheer into nothing perhaps five inches from the toes of her shoes.

"Jesus Almighty!" I said.

But she was staring straight ahead smiling with her mouth open. She took off her shoes and threw them over the cliff and we heard them hit rock faint and far away minutes later.

Boann tore off her belt and threw that over the cliff too.

"Oh sweet Lord God I feel so funny. I feel Your fingers on my shoulder. I felt His fingers on my shoulder, Billy, so I stopped. I want to rest my head in the people's lap because God is splitting out of it. I want to put on white and go into the cities for a prophet."

There were words I should have said to her then but all

I could think of was the city where my home was and of my home itself: that flat-roofed suburban cell stuck on the face of the Zoning Committee's earth, that noxious split-level fungus, that mushroom among the thousand mushrooms. A TV, a family room, a bar, cafe curtains, a barbecue rotisserie. And my parents talking. "If it wasn't for the goddamned taxes, last year I'd have netted—" "And Madge found this marvelous psychoanalyst who told her it isn't her fault Harry's a mess. It's entirely due to his Aunt Amy and the years he lived in Medicine Hat—"

Of a sudden Boann took hold of my hand and said, "You come with me, Billy. We'll go together, the two of us, and save the people."

And I wanted to shout, "Yes, by god! I'll go with you."

But I knew after we'd been to them and gone they would mention us at a cookout or at cocktails-and-buffet and say, "But that's hardly what I had in mind." And I thought that if I tried to save the people I'd lose myself and I was afraid to let go of myself and say yes. And so instead I laughed in her face like she'd cracked a joke. She stiffened and stared at me. Then the dogs treed and we ran off to find them.

THAT fall I went home and began to spend some time in my father's business where I was sick in the men's room nearly every day. I thought about Boann incessantly. I thought of her as my one chance in a million for escape. Still, I wouldn't let myself quit right away. Because the funny thing is, I was good at the business. I seemed to make all the right moves by instinct. Profits came dropping down like the rain falling. All I had to do was catch them. So I stayed until I salted away enough to start out on my own and then I left.

But by the time I got back to Kimball County, Grandpap was dead and Boann was married and my chance in a million was gone. It wasn't until I heard about Georgie being a crook that I thought it might be possible I'd get a second chance.

It was late afternoon before Boann came down from Gobbler's Knob stepping light as a deer. She didn't stop or look at me when I stood up from the seedlings but it was plain she'd known I was there. You couldn't fool her.

I followed her home. I wanted to talk to her but the set of her back worried me. Finally I hurried up behind her and reached my hand out to touch her but just then we came in sight of the house and we saw Georgie.

One look and I knew it was the revivalist. Georgie was lying with his back against the brush heap, his hands cupped under his head. He was young and not very big. He looked about twelve years old except his body was broad and powerfully built. I thought he was asleep but he wasn't. He was letting the fine mist of rain that was falling wash his face.

Boann walked through the gate and sat down beside him. The rain mist gathered in her hair and the westering sun shined through it. Boann smiled and Georgie smiled but they didn't look at one another.

I was disappointed again. I had hoped when they met they would argue. I wanted to hear her accuse him and hear him admit it but nothing like that happened. Still, instead of leaving, I waited because I knew the men would come. When they called Georgie to his face, Boann would have to believe it. Then surely she would turn to me, and that would be the time to tell her how I felt.

I didn't like to look at Boann and Georgie while I waited so I closed my eyes. When finally I heard the men coming and opened my eyes everything was pink: the sun was pink behind pink clouds. The sky and the grass were pink.

The sun set quickly. The rain had stopped but heat thunder drummed on the hills. The glow that grew up out of the west turned out to be men carrying torches. They wound up through the dark valley muttering like the thunder. Gobbler's Knob was still pink at the top and seemed to be floating. In the yard the air was smothering hot like sticking your face into a felt hat.

And there stood Boann and Georgie like two fools not even looking toward the men, not paying them any mind at all.

"Yonder comes Tussey and the rest to tar and feather Georgie," I said.

But Boann had her mind otherwise directed. There she stood and stretched up her two arms into the air.

"Billy, you'll laugh," Boann said, "but when I'm beside of Georgie like this, I can reach up my hands and touch God's face full of soft wrinkles.

"I can feel the Spirit flowing down my arms like boiling water. I can feel it and I can tell Georgie I feel it and he knows what I mean."

Before I could answer her back, the men came into the yard. I saw Boann in the torch light, her eyes glistening. Georgie was smiling at her. He didn't even turn to look at the men when they spewed into the yard.

He hardly looked at them even when Tussey walked up, grabbed his shirt and ripped it off his shoulders. Seven or maybe eight of the men were already gathering sticks on the slope below the yard. They brought the sticks up and dumped them on the brush heap. They were war whooping like Indians. They threw lighted torches onto the pile.

"Where at's our money, preacher?" Tussey said, drunk as a lord.

The men joggled in, elbowing and rough. They pushed Boann away from Georgie. They took Georgie in their hands and threw him onto the ground.

I watched Boann. Now she would see Georgie was really a thief. The men had the feathers in burlap sacks. They had a bucket of tar. I thought Georgie would yell but he didn't. He didn't do anything. Boann was standing at the edge of the yard staring off into the woods.

She was watching for something. She was listening, too. And all this time she never glanced at Georgie. Before long I saw she heard what she was listening for. I strained my ears but all I could hear was the men shouting and a dog whining and yelping around at the back of the farmhouse.

The perspiration beaded out on my upper lip and on my forehead cold as icewater. Boann was playing some little game of her own and had been all along and I had missed it.

Right away she walked off toward the house. She moved so fast I was scarcely sure where she went but I ran into the dark musty house in time to hear her bare feet pat across the front room and into the parlour. Still standing in the doorway, I made the big effort.

"Boann," I said, "now they've nabbed Georgie and you see he's a sure enough crook, I want to say—"

But she was playing some little game of her own. She lit the gas mantle in the parlour. It caught and she stood with one arm raised turning it up. The light licked down her arm and spread into her face. It lit up not only Boann but also a man standing in the middle of the parlour floor.

"I been waiting for you, Roy," Boann said, never looking toward me at all.

Roy wet his big hanging-open lips with his pink tongue and stared at her. While both of them stood there not saying anything, Roy's yellow hound dog pushed a hole in the rotten screen of the kitchen door and came in, whining.

Boann didn't move but after a while Roy took a step toward

the back door.

"Out front," Boann said, "they're fixing to tar and feather Georgie."

All the time Roy was smiling this very vacant smile.

"They're drunk enough they might kill Georgie," Boann said.

Roy smiled. I could hear Boann breathing. Roy began to work his mouth but no sound came. His chin got wet. The dog pawed his legs and whined. After a long time of this, Roy turned toward the back door.

"I got to tell you these few things, Roy," Boann said.

Roy stopped and licked his lips again. He stood motionless with his back toward Boann.

"You think I'm dumb," said Boann. "I ain't. I know something has got hold of Georgie. I've knowed it for a long time. He's easy led. I know that, too. But now it's me that's got hold of him, Roy. I got my hold this morning. He knowed and I knowed. I'm telling you the truth."

Roy turned around, still smiling.

Boann's voice went hoarse. "Georgie's let go of you, Roy," she said, "and now I'm telling you to turn loose of him."

She brought out the last three words very slow. Roy rubbed his bleary blue eyes with the heel of his hand. Then he put both his hands behind his back and worked his mouth, making no sound.

"I know you can talk," Boann told him very quietly. "I've knowed you ain't no dummy for a long time."

Roy, standing with his hands behind his back, stopped smiling.

"Your dog knows you can talk, Roy," Boann said. "That yeller hound keeps whining up into your face. Why? Because you talk to him when you're alone. He can't understand what's wrong with you, you don't say nothing now."

"When Georgie's with you a long time and then with me. I can tell you been talking to him. I can sort your ideas out of his head like pinching rotten apples."

"You ain't no idiot, either. I've seen your eyes when you look at money. Talking about money, that's how come you're here this minute. You're come after Grandpap's money I told them men I'd put in the desk drawer. There ain't none. I made it up."

"The Great God damn you, then," Roy screeched out: pow! like an explosion, "and all your kin, you long-legged Jesus-loving hill witch!"

And he kept on, using words strong as the smell of old blood. He piled them up on Boann. He had a knife in the hand he took from behind his back.

Boann didn't look at it. "The reason I waited for you to come back," she went on to say to him calmly, "is to tell you, find yourself another meal ticket. You know me and you know I mean what I say. Turn him loose."

Roy didn't look sleepy any more. His eyes weren't bleary but wide open and wicked as hell. He jumped Boann with the knife. The blade missed but his weight threw her down full length on the floor.

While I dived into the parlour and on top of Roy I was thinking over and over like a cracked record: 'All the time there wasn't any more hope than there is snow in hell; up or down Gobbler's Knob, never any hope at all.'

And while I beat Roy on the head, I laughed because the whole thing was such a goddamned crazy joke on me. Roy dropped his knife when I landed on him but now under my fingers his shoulders heaved up in an ocean roll and I fell off onto the floor.

"Roy."

It was Boann's voice. She was standing in the kitchen doorway. She sounded very calm. I thought it would be nice if she started screaming for help but she didn't. Roy hesitated, kneeling on the floor, looking up at her.

"They're getting ready to tar and feather Georgie," Boann said. "Out in front. They're going to heat up the tar. They're building a fire on the old brush heap."

Roy lunged up off the floor like a sprinter and out through the front room without stopping. Boann stood with her arms folded on her chest. I got to my feet and watched my knees shaking. We heard Roy throw open the front door. Outside air blew out the gas mantle in the parlour.

I went and looked out through the parlour window. Roy was outside walking across the front porch. He had taken Grandpap's shotgun off the wall.

"He hid the money under that brush pile," Boann said. She was standing behind me looking after Roy. "Them fools is burning up their own money." She laughed.

The shotgun exploded. Before they grabbed him, Roy sprayed four men with buckshot. He kept hollering all the while they wrestled with him. By the time they finally understood what he was saying, the money was ashes.

When I looked back at Boann she was already moving past me. "Goodbye, Billy Watt," she said and walked out the front door, straight and tall as King Solomon's queen.

Boann moved over to where Georgie stood in the firelight with only one man holding him. The rest were fighting Roy. Georgie was naked to the waist, sweating and dirty, with a patch of tar on his chest and one on his face.

The man holding Georgie looked uneasy when Boann came up to him. Pretty soon he let go of Georgie. Boann and Georgie walked off together toward Gobbler's Knob.

I sat down on the porch and, while the men tarred and feathered Roy, I thought how the only difference between me and that lucky son-of-a-bitch Georgie was that he knew when to let go.

Nathaniel Hawthorne

JOHN N. MILLER

Marshalled behind you, eyeing the very page
On which you mark their lineage, file the grave
Progenitors of conscience. You have drawn them
To your own mind's fancy: bearded men
In steepled hats, our persecuting fathers
Vested in dark mantles, breathing wrath
Against all impulse, burning witches,
Shooting savages.

Such men exist
Within the Salems of our past, blending
Guilt with history. Those you have rendered,
Though they serve as mental fixtures—butts
For easy license, late-fall silhouettes—
Staunch in your craft confront us still
Unsmiling, head to head, peremptory.

Worshipping the Oak

MICHAEL WATERS

Tonight we will stop them.
Armed with pitchforks, ax-
handles and crosses, we cross
the tracks and enter the wood.

Now we can hear their chants,
and see them circling an oak,
a small fire at the root.
We know them all: the man

who owns the hardware store,
the one who sells us grain,
those who work in the post-office.
They have all been here before.

We will strike with the force
of lightning. We will pile
the corpses under the tree
and build up the fire.

Then we will return home,
and sleep like gods,
and know we have done
the only thing men could do.

Rehearsing the Dream

MICHAEL WATERS

Maybe the sun does seem ready
to blaze into memory as an apple,
as this morning the last snow melts
into your dream of a bride, alone,
kneeling near the horizon
as if waiting for the moon to rise
somewhere in her face.

Suppose all night your sleep
has drawn you to this field,
hidden by a barn,
one sleigh abandoned in the rafters.
Maybe you can return
to that pale moon-struck woman
from such a clear distance,
not memory but bells,
their tremor in the crisp air
through the soft leather reins
you rub for warmth in your fingers.

First Snow

HOWARD FRANK MOSHER

BANKED UP snug against the outside stone foundation of a farmhouse, spruce boughs will catch and cradle the first hard snow of the year and hold it all winter, turning a cold wind and keeping in stove warmth better than any expensive siding you can name me. So on the morning before deer season opened I invited my older half-brother Bernard over to cut spruce with me on my side of the mountain because I knew he had sold all his own softwood for pulp to clear back taxes the previous spring. Stepping across to his frozen mudridged dooryard, I knew also that he wouldn't come. He would say he might drop down later on in the forenoon, but he never would, he would sit in his warm kitchen drinking coffee and cleaning his rifle and later on he might split enough kindling to cover the bottom of the kitchen woodbox if his boys weren't handy. When the first fall blizzard set in he would send his boys out to the barn to lug baled hay he couldn't afford to waste and chunk it up against the side of the house. That was Bernard's way and his floors would be drafty all winter for it, but that was also his business. As his neighbor I could only invite him.

He opened the door and drew his hand across the dark stubble of whiskers along his jaw. "Come off chill," he said, stepping out onto his stoop and sniffing at his wood smoke in the cold air. "Fixing to snow. I guess I should ought to bring up my heifers out of that lower pasture and get them into the barn before they freeze to death or some goddamned downstater shoots at them for fourlegged animals." Fourlegged animals is Bernard's word for deer.

He eased down his shaky steps to the ground, cursing their rottenness as he did a dozen times a day, and stood by his woodpile and said maybe he would get around to lopping spruce after deer season. He had left the kitchen door open and I could smell

the hot coffee on the stove and the heavy warm rankness of Bernard's barn boots.

"You know where the spruce are if you want any," I said.

"Yes," he said. "But I calculate I will be hard at it all day just to drive up those heifers so some foreigner from Massachusetts don't slaughter them for fourlegged animals." He rubbed his arms. "Say Maurice. Might be some signs up on the mountain today where you're lopping. Keep your eyes open."

"I will," I said, walking back toward my house across the loop of dirt lane that separates our places.

"Maurice," Bernard called. "Gordon and Ordney'll be coming up from downcountry to get in a day's hunting tomorrow. Keep your eyes open." He went back up the steps onto the stoop, cursing absentmindedly. I waved over my shoulder and went into my house through the sweet-smelling woodshed.

I drank my midmorning cup of coffee with Emily and read the mail and for the rest of the morning I cut boughs on the mountain. Working up along the logging trace, I jumped two coveys of partridge. The birds waited until I was nearly under their roosts before they flew, then exploded out of the trees fifty or sixty feet above the ground, and I knew Bernard had been right about the weather. It was going to snow. Years ago when we had hunted the mountain together every fall day after school Bernard had shown me how partridge will roost high before a big snow and let you walk right under them, not like in early October when they hear you coming over the dry leaves and fly up low and fast while you're still far out of shotgun range, burring their wings like a big John Deere tractor starting up. I could have brought my shotgun back after dinner and filled out my limit, but I had a full afternoon's work ahead of me and besides, I didn't want to risk frightening off the deer. Their tracks were everywhere.

I told Emily about the deer tracks over dinner. "They've moved higher up the mountain now that Bernard's spruce are mostly gone," I said. "I think I can drive one down into the orchard in the morning. If you want to wait by the big rock between the orchard and the woodlot?"

"Why don't you and Bernard go? You always go once with Bernard."

"Bernard's cousins are coming up from downstate tomorrow. Gordon and Ordney. I expect they'll monopolize his hunting time. I'll be surprised if Bernard doesn't shoot them each a deer, too, though I don't know why he does it. It would be a long time before I would shoot game just so that pair could drive back

down the line with trophies on their hoods. I'll go with Bernard next week sometime. I can't very well invite him tomorrow and not his cousins. They're where I draw the line. I'll go with Bernard next week. He get his heifers in?"

"No, I don't believe so."

"He should if I do say so. It's going to snow tonight. Maybe late this afternoon."

"Maybe you should tell him?"

"I don't need to. He knew it well enough this morning when he stopped outside to talk to me. He told me."

"For an unschooled man Bernard knows a great deal about such things, doesn't he? Such things as weather and the animals."

I looked out the kitchen window at Bernard's sagging weathered house. I could see his stoop and steps lilt and I wondered for the one hundredth time why under the sun he didn't fix them. He was handy enough with tools. I sipped my coffee, looking at the pitching steps. "What Bernard knows," I said, "is the mountain. Every foot of it. He's no hand to farm and he's no great hand to keep up his place and we both know it and he knows it. But he can take you blindfolded to every ginseng patch and bee tree on the mountain and every trout hole in the brook. And every deer run, too. He warned me to keep my eyes open for deer this morning."

I stood and picked up my dinner dishes and carried them across to the sink. "You know," I said, looking out the window above the sink up at the mountain, "if I had Bernard's woods sense I don't know that I'd care to farm either. Why would anybody fool with heifers if he could call a buck deer out of the woods by banging two old antlers together?"

Emily brought her dishes to the sink and stood beside me, looking up at the hoarfrost rimming the mountain. "I'm not sure," she said. "And yet I'm just as glad to know that our heifers are in the barn and warm."

So was I. That was one less consideration that afternoon while I banked the house and later on down in the woodlot while I cut the last load of wood for next spring's sugaring. By four o'clock the snow clouds had set in, and I looked at them, piling up big and grey and heavy, with the satisfaction of knowing that we were tight for winter. Then out of the corner of my eye I saw something move behind a fat beech tree a hundred yards away. I turned my head slowly and saw a buck deer looking back at me, alert, curious, very big. He moved his head slightly and I saw that half of his left antler was snapped off. Unhurriedly I started the saw again and began to cut wood. When I looked

a minute later the buck was gone.

I was late starting my chores that evening and it was already dusk when I finally came out of the barn. Bernard must have been watching for the barn lights to go out. As soon as I stepped outside he appeared in his doorway, tall and dark against the yellow glow from the kitchen. He swayed a little, steadying himself with one hand high on the casing. In the other hand he held a can of beer.

I hurried on up toward the house, angry with Bernard for making me want to avoid him and with myself for wanting to, but he called out my name and as he lurched out onto the stoop there was a sudden terrific splintering of dry rotten wood and he was plunging down through the broken steps and cursing. Then he was standing where the steps had been, cursing and holding onto the edge of the hole in the stoop with one hand and rubbing his leg with the other and already beginning to talk at me as I hurried up through his dooryard.

"No kid of mine is about to tramp half a mile to the county road to catch the schoolbus my taxes keep on the road to pick the others up at their doorsteps," he said loudly. He made no attempt to climb out of the debris he was standing in. Beer from the can he had dropped on the stoop was foaming down into the hole beside him, running over his hand. His face was flushed and his cheeks were red against his beard stubble in the cold twilight. Inside I could see his wife moving from the stove to the table and back to the stove again, heavy and slow, evidently neither knowing nor caring whether Bernard had broken his leg or his neck in the fall, not even shutting the kitchen door on the cold.

"I told Francis this afternoon," Bernard shouted up at me out of the hole. "I sent in a check for upwards of half my current school taxes last week and Francis sent it back and said he must have it all. He said it wouldn't do for me to get behind on taxes again. He said softwood don't grow that fast. So I took him all of it this afternoon after dinner and told him no kid of mine was about to buck waisthigh drifts to wade half a mile to catch a schoolbus that my tax dollar pays to pick up others at their door. I said there's them in this town that's getting tired of turning over their milk check to that school and not getting no better service."

"Is he going to send up the bus?" I said, knowing the answer.

"No he ain't and when it storms they just ain't going to school. I need them to help me in the woods anyhow. And as if all that warn't enough of a day's work in itself, this leg's com-

mencing to stiffen up on me. As if all that other warn't enough."

I held out my hand to help him out of the steps but he refused it, reaching his long arm up, gripping the doorcasing and hauling himself onto the sill. He began to rub his leg and curse.

"Anything I can do?" I asked.

Rubbing his leg and cursing, he appeared not to answer directly but in the sly way of a man who has had too much beer to realize that you will see immediately that he is trying to get something out of you that you don't want to give him, he said, "See anything up on the mountain today?"

Right away I knew what he meant. Now that he was going to be out of commission until his leg mended he wanted me to issue an open invitation for his cousins to hunt my mountain. "They're up there," I said shortly.

"That's a smooth place to hunt," he said slyly. "Not like my swamp now that it's been cut. A party could get lost in my swamp now I'm crippled up and can't guide them."

"I'm going out with Emily in the morning," I said. "It's coming on night, Bernard. Send one of your boys over if you need anything."

I turned abruptly. Then I felt the first dry flakes on my face. I put out my hand and looked against the arc light in my barnyard and saw that it was snowing lightly and steadily, and from behind me, standing on his doorsill above the debris of his own steps, Bernard said with a kind of harsh satisfaction not only in being accurate in his prediction but also in being put upon even by the weather, "I told you it would come off snow. And my heifers all still out.

After supper I oiled our boots and cleaned the .30.30 for Emily and checked over the cartridges. While she washed the dishes I told her about Bernard falling through his stoop and his trouble with Francis over the schoolbus and taxes. "He wants Francis' position on the school board," she said.

"What doesn't he want?" I said. "He wants Francis' position. He wants the schoolbus to come up the mountain where it is all a man can do in the winter to come up with a tractor and Canadian chains. He wants his children to do his winter's work for him. And now he wants me to give Gordon and Ordney the run of my woods tomorrow."

"Bernard is what he is, Maurice. He's poor. He's poor in every way."

"Yes," I said. "I know it. Who knows it better than I do? When his rundown machinery plays out I lend him mine. When

his hay gives out in March I carry his stock on mine until spring. I hire him a month of the year to help me sugar and pay him more than fair wages." I rubbed the oil hard into the boot. "Don't mistake me. I'm not complaining. I live up here on this mountain with him and we're neighbors. We're brothers. I'll listen to his grousing and I'll chase his heifers if he is going to be laid up. If I didn't know better than to hurt his pride I'd cut him a wagonload of spruce. But I won't have his cousins running my woods with rifles they don't know how to handle."

I finished waterproofing our boots, filled the woodbox and banked up the stoves for night. When we went to bed it was snowing fast in the arc light and the barnyard was white.

SNOW WAS still falling hard when we got up at four-thirty and there were several inches of snow on the ground when I went out for chores. At six, sitting over our coffee, our boots warming near the stove, we could just make out the glow from the sideways window between Bernard's kitchen roof and the upper peak of his house. We couldn't tell whether Gordon's camper was in the dooryard.

The snow let up slightly as Emily and I walked down the lane to the orchard. Dawn was a cold bluish glow lasting a minute or two and then it was snowing steadily again with only a pale grey to see a few feet by. I thought of Bernard's few heifers down in the swampy pasture along the county road. So long as it was snowing they were safe enough but if the wind came up and it turned off cold after the snow stopped they would be in serious trouble with the softwood cover gone. I would have to bring them in later on in the day.

I left Emily by the boulder on the edge of the orchard, cut out around the hardwood trees where I'd seen the big buck the day before and struck off up the mountain into the spruce and balsam. My plan was to crisscross the lower ridges and drive the buck out of the thick softwood cover he must have sought in the storm, down through the woodlot toward the orchard where Emily was waiting. I crossed the brook, still running free and steaming a little in the cold, and halfway up the first ridge I jumped a good big doe. She was lying in under a low clump of balsam fir Christmas trees and I nearly stepped on her before she leaped up, crashing through the drifts and on over the crest of the ridge. I was carrying my old .22, more to be carrying something than because I planned to use it, and there was no doe season anyway, so I cut across her tracks and began crossing

and recrossing the upper side of the ridge, working my way down toward the woodlot and hoping that the buck with half a left antler was between me and Emily.

Walking slowly and deliberately snapping dead limbs under foot, I was nearly in the woodlot when I heard the shots, one, two reports from the .30.30, small and muffled in the falling snow. I hurried down through the trees and out into the clearing between the woodlot and the boulder, where Emily stood over the buck, lying dead in the snow now, shot twice cleanly through the chest, its broken horn jutting up sharp and surprising even to me, who had already seen it.

"It's a lovely animal," Emily said.

"Yes," I said. It seemed cold now after the excitement of shooting the buck. The falling snow was already beginning to cover the wound, sifting steadily across the dark stain blotting out over its thick coat. I took out my hunting knife and knelt in the snow by the deer. Then I stopped dead still.

"There," I said. "Did you hear?"

"Another shot," Emily said. "So Bernard did get out this morning."

I looked up at her. "That shot," I said. "Where did it seem to come from?"

"It's snowing hard, Maurice," she said quickly. "We can't know for sure."

Emily was right, I knew. Several times when hunting in falling snow with Bernard I have been badly fooled by the direction of a shot. But all the while I was dressing out Emily's deer and dragging it up to the maple on the edge of our property across from Bernard's, where I have hung one buck each year since we divided Father's farm, I was uneasy.

When I went across to Bernard's around ten the snow had stopped, though the sun stayed under. Gordon's camper was buried under a foot of snow in the dooryard and the snow had drifted in the place where the steps had caved in the previous evening. Bernard hobbled to the door and I asked him if I might go for his heifers but he said his boys had gone to fetch them. In behind him I could see Gordon and Ordney sitting at the kitchen table in their hunting jackets and boots, drinking coffee and looking out at me.

"I don't expect a man that's got a whole mountain to hunt himself to have time for his neighbors," Bernard said. Then he did something I had never known him to do before. He stepped back inside and shut the door in my face. He hadn't even mentioned Emily's deer.

Or any deer for that matter I thought a minute later, running my hand over the rough coat of the big buck, now hanging from the maple by his incomplete antlers. And then I knew what had bothered me since the second I heard that other shot, and only wondered why I had been so long coming to know. I knew why Bernard had been more than short and why Gordon and Ordney had stared at me. They had taken a deer on my land.

I HAD plenty of time. They wouldn't drag it out until evening and I knew what I would have to do. I couldn't let it pass. I told Emily at dinner and she said yes if it was the cousins and no if it was Bernard and I said it wasn't Bernard, he was too lame and furthermore I didn't believe that he would risk whatever he stood to gain from me just to shoot my deer when he could and did get one on his side of the mountain any time he chose.

I waited until after chores, finishing them earlier than usual, and while it was still daylight I walked down through the meadow, off the lane so there would be no tracks, and cut around the orchard and the woodlot and up the mountainside. I crossed the brook but this time I cut directly over to the old logging trace, knowing that Gordon and Ordney wouldn't have strayed far from easy walking.

Their footprints had drifted in but I could see a faint depression in the snow where they had climbed up the path and a wider and deeper depression where they had dragged their deer away from the trail into the trees. And when I found it hidden clumsily in a spuce clump and saw that it was a doe, no doubt the large doe I had scared early in the morning on the ridge above the brook, I was glad I hadn't brought a gun, because there was no telling what men like Gordon and Ordney might do if an armed man came upon them when they were on his property with a doe deer. I brushed over my tracks and stepped behind a big spruce close by to wait for the men who had shot the deer.

It was as easy as I had expected. They came up in the twilight, breathing hard and cursing, cursing me mostly, for making them wait until dark to get their deer. Staying well out of sight behind them, I let them drag it all the way down the mountain and across the lower pasture and up the north wall in the deep snow, clear to my property line, before I came up on them.

"Let go of that animal and get off my property," I said.

"What you do after that is your affair but I advise you to get off this mountain before the game warden gets here." I stepped up close to them and they stood in the near dark looking at me. I looked back at them. They had a gun but we were too close to the house. Gordon opened his mouth and started to say something.

"Just get out," I said. "And maybe you hadn't better mention any of this to Bernard."

"Why Bernie he tol' us where to—" Ordney began.

"Shut up," Gordon said and pulled him off toward Bernard's. I waited until I was sure they were gone and then I dragged the doe across the field to the house. As I dumped it by the back stoop I noticed that the wind was blowing and it was snowing again.

I went inside, stamping the snow off my boots in the woodshed, and stood in the kitchen with my boots still on and told Emily. Then there was nothing more to say and I started across for the phone.

"Someone's coming over from Bernard's," Emily said just as I picked up the receiver. I put it back down and walked to the door into the woodshed

"No need for you to hear this," I said.

"I'll stay," she said. "Bernard won't say with me here what he otherwise might."

I went out and opened the outside woodshed door just as Bernard started to pound on it and he nearly fell inside. As he lurched up against me I could smell the beer on his breath over the stale odor of wood smoke on his clothing. Bernard was bold on two beers and on three he could be rash, but he limped back outside and down the steps again so he would not be quarreling with me in my own house and I stepped out onto the stoop, feeling the wind, stronger now, blowing against my face.

He started in on me as soon as he was off my steps. "Now before you do anything hasty," he said, swaying a little in the wind, "I want to tell you one thing. You send Kinneson over to my place, I'm going to swear to him I see you shoot that doe. I ain't telling you what to do, that's your business, but if I was you I'd back water."

"Listen," I said, my temper rising so that I had to control it by speaking low, "you send Gordon and Ordney back down-state and I won't send Kinneson over to your place. I'll tell him I don't know who shot the doe. I don't have any quarrel with my neighbors and I don't want any but I won't have that camper over there in your dooryard and them sitting in your kitchen flouting my right to own property and obey the law on it."

"Then you come across and do something about it," Bernard shouted. By the arc light I could see the blowing snow beginning to collect on his black hair and eyelashes and his face glowed dark and angry under the flakes on his cheeks. He looked at the doe slumped in the snow by the stoop and then he looked back up at me and I looked at him and he saw that I had said all I was going to. He turned half around into the arc light and for the first time seemed to notice the falling snow. He made a jerky backhanded motion before his eyes as if to brush the snow out of his field of vision and then he shouted with his back to me, "I'm through. Do you hear? I'm through. Through being put upon by school directors and heifers and neighbors and relations and ALL THIS GODDAMN SNOW."

I went back into the house and sat down at the kitchen table. "I'll give them one hour to get well downstate," I said.

I took off my boots and set them in the woodshed. I looked at a magazine I'd already read and watched Emily make supper. After supper I called Kinneson and told him I'd found a doe cold and gutted by my north wall but the snow had covered up any tracks. He said he'd try to get up the mountain for it in the morning if the road was passable. I thanked him and hung up. From where I was standing I could look out the window and see by the arc light the dark shape of Emily's deer hanging in the maple and throwing a long shadow across my brother's dooryard. It was full dark and snowing hard.

Marginalia . . .

(continued)

growth and migration has been retrogression with respect to residential and school integration." Now there's a sentence the writer did not read aloud to his wife. Unless she too was an educator or had been otherwise corrupted by jargon, she would have said, "What, dear? What's that mean?"

By definition, the good writer is a musician. His ear tells him how to make the sound and the sense complement each other. I do not have to look far for examples. Listen to the bitterness and disappointment in these words of the aging poet, Alston Banner, in *J. D. McClatchy's "The Dying Fall"* (in this issue):

We are all penny prophets predicting what has already turned out against us. We long for respect and settle for fame—and live on air in the branches of rotting oaks. The stars still move to our silence, and the bears dance only if we feed them.

Do you hear the bite of those p's and d's and t's in the first sentence? Do you hear the slow climbing ascent of those o's in "long for respect" and the sudden disappointing reversal of "settle for fame"? If you don't, perhaps you should try reading the passage aloud, savoring the sound as you would the play of melody and counter melody in a Bach fugue.

If we are not to multiply the number of readers and writers without ears, we must begin to pay more attention to the lost art of reading aloud. Children first learn to read by reading aloud, but as soon as they progress to reading silently, the habit is set, and they put away their delight in the sounds of words along with their Dr. Seuss books and other "childish" things. And they learn early to hate poetry because they don't "understand" it. It never occurs to them (and sometimes not to their teachers) that it might be worthwhile to listen to the sound of the language in a poem before they start looking for a message. And when they get to college, the same children can't understand James or Faulkner until they learn again to hear the rhythms of the spoken language in these writers.

In recent years the sensitivity group has been fashionable. If we are anxious to avoid the death of the imagination in more of our readers and writers, perhaps we need some such activity to awaken us once more to the magnificence of language and the power of sensory images. In my imaginary sensitivity group we would sit around (fully clothed) and read aloud to one

another. We'd read the best prose we could find, and then we'd read the best poetry just to see what language can be when it's used to its fullest capabilities. Every now and again someone would say, "Read that line again, will you?" and maybe we'd stop for a moment after the second reading and just shake our heads in admiration. Evelyn Wood would not be invited. We would not read War and Peace in four hours; it might take us that long to finish a sonnet. And nobody would give a damn. We'd be enjoying human communication at its highest level. There are worse ways to spend an evening.

—J. J. K.

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CONTRIBUTORS

In the past our "Poet's Portfolio" has included works by Thomas Snapp and Claude Koch. The portfolio is of special interest this time, especially to readers of WILLIAM HEYEN's latest collection, *Noise in the Trees: Poems and a Memoir*. One of America's promising younger poets, Heyen teaches at SUNY in Brockport, N.Y. He has published in *Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, and numerous other periodicals and has been awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship for Creative Writers for 1974-75. J. D. McCLATCHY, formerly Associate Editor of this magazine, now teaches at Yale. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *College English*, and the *Yale Review*. An earlier story in these pages, "Allonym," was selected for the O. Henry Awards collection. CLAUDE KOCH, Professor of English at La Salle, is a former Rockefeller and Sewanee Fellow whose poetry and fiction have appeared in the *Sewanee Review*, the *Southern Review*, and the *Antioch Review*. "Reverie and Departure" will reacquaint readers of his earlier novel, *The Kite in the Sea*, with the principals from that work, who continue to live on in the imagination of their creator. This is ANNABEL THOMAS's second appearance in *Four Quarters*. Her work has also been seen in *Forum* and the *Kansas Quarterly*. JOHN N. MILLER grew up in the Hawaiian Islands, studied under Yvor Winters at Stanford, and is now Professor of English at Denison University. His poems have appeared here on three previous occasions. Several years ago he edited a collection of readings, *A World of Her Own: Writers and the Feminist Controversy*. JAMES C. McCULLAGH has recently completed a dissertation at Lehigh on *Aesthetics and the Religious Mind: Francois Mauriac, Graham Greene, and Flannery O'Connor*. He is on the editorial staff at Rodale Press and is a Visiting Poet with the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. HOWARD FRANK MOSHER lives on a farm in northern Vermont, where he is working on his first novel and a collection of short stories. Other stories from the collection have appeared in *Epoch*, *Cimarron Review*, and *Colorado Quarterly*. MICHAEL WATERS is Poet in Residence for the South Carolina Arts Commission this year. His poems have appeared in the *American Poetry Review* and the *Iowa Review*.

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